

## **KNOW THE LAWS? BY ANDY MELROSE AND PETER SHORTELL.**

*Andy Melrose is the Referee Department's Training & Education Officer. Peter Shortell is from the Gloucester Referees' Society. They compiled a second set of situations with various possible answers for the referee. Test your knowledge of the Law and see how well you can do.*

### **QUESTIONS/SITUATIONS FROM CORRESPONDENTS.**

- 1.** I was wondering if you could clarify something for me.

A few years ago I was playing as the openside flanker. The opposition centre broke through the line and I was chasing after him. He was fly-hacking the ball and was faster than me. I only had one opportunity to reach him, so I tackled him as his foot caught the ball as he was fly-hacking.

I saw it as a fair tackle because, if he was in the act of kicking the ball he was playing the ball, much the same as if I had tackled him during any other kick. The ref at the time saw it differently and gave a penalty try.

Can you explain if/why I was in the wrong, please?

- 2.** I was reading a recent article in a popular rugby magazine discussing the use of rugby 'mitts'. I was wondering what views you have on this topic and are mitts legal?

- 3.** I've never known this situation to occur, but have often wondered what the laws say about it:

If the kick from a penalty try is missed, are any points at all awarded? I don't see how they can be, as in this scenario there would have been neither a successful grounding nor a successful kick at goal.

- 4.** Here's a situation from last Saturday's match between Red and Blue (USA).

Situation:

- Red is attacking inside the Blue 22.

- After three phases, Red form a ruck inside the Blue five metre line.
- The ruck is formed when the tight head picks up off the back, drives forward and posts the ball two metres from the goal line.
- He is joined at the point of contact by two other forwards and the ball is at their feet.
- The Red number eight hits the back of the ruck and helps drive it forward while picking up the ball and placing it down over the line.

Question - is this a try?

The number eight did not break from the ruck.

He was stuck in at the back and driving forward with the other players.

The surge moved the ruck forward and the number eight picked up and placed the ball over the line.

Question - is this offside?

Since the number eight did not break from the ruck and his shoulders were still bound to the players in front, does this place the other players in an offside position, thus nullifying the try?

The referee did award the try and no questions were asked. I was the Red number eight and I am a qualified referee.

**5.** For the last two years I have been reffing after a medical problem put paid to my rugby playing. I'm enjoying it very much and am really getting a taste for it. The Laws are becoming clearer to me with each game but I still have one problem - where to stand.

Sometimes I feel I am getting in the way of play and I get some real dirty looks. I can take it but I just want to be in the right place at the right time.

For example, what do I do at lineouts? Do I stand in front of the touch judge or infield? Where should I stand at set scrums, left or right? At rucks and mauls, do I stand behind the attacking side, behind the defending side or in the middle?

Could you give me some tips?

**6.** Please could you clarify basically for how long the advantage should be played? Is it until an attacking team has sufficient advantage (i.e. metres gained) or until a penalty for a separate incident has occurred (i.e. offside)?

I am confused because I have seen the advantage played in Premiership games which has lasted for approximately thirty seconds or, on another occasion, approximately two and a half minutes.

- 7.** Red grubber kicks. Blue full back falls on the ball near the touchline and is dragged into touch by an onside Red attacker.
- 8.** Red player grubber kicks. Blue full back falls on ball. He tries to get to his feet but is prevented by an onside Red attacker, trying to get the ball, who then falls over him. Other players arrive and the ball is trapped.
- 9.** Red player grubber kicks. Blue full back falls on the ball. Red attacker and Blue defender, coming from the same direction shoulder to shoulder, compete for the ball, both on their feet, before Blue full back has time to do anything.
- 10.** Red take the ball into a maul and are driving slowly forward, but get stopped. The ball-carrier puts the ball on the ground, but his team can make no further progress. The players lose their footing and the ball is buried.
- 11.** At a lineout, the Red jumper catches the ball and as soon as he hits the ground, he is tackled low by a Blue player and loses the ball forward.
- 12.** At a lineout on the Blue 5 metre line, Red jumper catches the ball, is held in the air by his supporters, who march across the goal-line. Blue are initially reluctant to drive in, but eventually do so, bringing the Red ball-carrier to ground in in-goal, lying on top of the ball.
- 13.** At a lineout on Blue 5 metre line, Blue players set up a barrage of shouting, preventing Red players from hearing the lineout calls. Red thrower delays the throw to run down the line making sure players know the call.
- 14.** From a Red kick-off, the ball runs into in-goal. A Blue defender falls on it.
- 15.** From a Red kick-off, the ball runs into in-goal. A Blue defender picks it up and turns round to see what is behind him. There is nobody chasing hard, but he still decides to touch the ball down.
- 16.** From a kick-off, the ball runs into in-goal. A Blue defender picks it up and runs a couple of steps towards the dead-ball line before touching the ball down without looking round.

**17.** Blue full back kicks for touch from within his 22. The ball is about to cross the plane of touch at halfway, but a Red player with one foot on the touchline attempts to catch it. He knocks it on.

**18.** Blue full back kicks for touch from within his 22. The ball crosses the plane of touch at halfway. A Red player with both feet on the ground in the field of play, reaches out to catch the ball, but cannot hold on. The ball does not go forward.

## ANSWERS

1. You can tackle a player who has the ball in his possession. In your example he did *not* have the ball in his possession when you 'tackled' him. A fly hack is not like a kick from hand in the circumstances you describe. Bad luck - good decision by the referee.

Just think how kind the ref was because I might have given you a yellow or a red card as well as giving the penalty try to the opposition!

2. I shall look forward to wearing mine at a chilly afternoon in Newcastle in January! Seriously, I cannot see what all of the fuss is about. Gloves are illegal (for players!) but Law 4.1.d says they can wear "mitts (fingerless gloves)".

If people object because they give someone an advantage, then we might as well take the players' boots away as they give the kicker an advantage as well. Provided there is no safety implication, then let them carry on - we have all got more important issues in the Game. Somehow, however, I cannot imagine the Gloucester front row wearing them!!

3. Congratulations - you have just asked me something that nobody has ever asked me in my whole refereeing life. Whether that is a good thing from your point of view I am not sure.

The answer to your question is yes. As soon as the ref blows for a penalty try then the attackers are awarded five points. By using foul play the defenders have stopped the attackers getting their due reward for good play, so the referee has to step in and award the points.

4. Nice to know we get as far as the USA. I have had some wonderful times over there but I have yet to be invited to Michigan, so if you need me.....!

This is a tricky one and it may come down to the way the referee saw it - in your favour, obviously. I hope I am not being pedantic but to form a ruck, the ball is on the ground and at least one player from each side must be bound over it

If a proper ruck had formed and you picked it up I would penalise you for handling in a ruck - you do say "the number eight did not break from the ruck. His shoulders were still bound", which does make me question the validity of the decision as it seems the ruck was still in progress. However, if his shoulders are touching the player in front and he has broken his bind with *both* arms, he is not binding, the ruck is over and the 8 can pick up.

If the ruck had driven the ball over the line and you fell on it, that would be fine as there would be no ruck in Law (as the ball was then over the line).

It just goes to show that if the referee makes the decision quickly enough and confidently enough, the players don't sometimes care about the Laws.

**5.** This is a huge topic! You should think about taking a referee course, which has a section on positioning.

Briefly! It is of little developmental use to run out onto the pitch with a whole lot of pre-planned 'I must stand heres' in your head. Rugby is too dynamic and, in some matches, too ill-structured to allow this approach to work. I would suggest you try out prioritisation to work out the best position.

Some people have found BPON useful - **B**all, **P**articipants, **O**ffside, **N**ext.

1. **B**all - be in a position to see it for the maximum amount of time, e.g. get close at the tackle/maul/ruck, then
2. **P**articipants - be in a position to see the maximum number. Try to get away or you will get caught in 'traffic', then
3. **O**ffside - get into a position to see any offside lines. Move the head, scan wider, then
4. **N**ext - be in a position to get to the next most likely phase of play – be on your toes physically and mentally

Sit down with a piece of paper and try to apply the principle to the questions you ask. You are likely to come up with solutions which will stick in your head; this will be more useful than me telling you. After each match, evaluate what worked/didn't work and why - then amend your notes and practise. It is not easy but you may find this approach better than the "I must stand here" idea.

**6.** You ask a difficult question to which there is no simple answer. I would ask you, "How long is a piece of string?" - and the answer is, "It all depends"!

Advantage can be territorial - a gain in ground, or tactical – when the non-offending team can play the ball as they wish.

I am pleased you have seen the length of advantage vary because it should be - dependent upon the circumstances. For example, the referee might apply advantage differently according to a whole range of factors - the temper of the match, the score, the offence (was it scrum or penalty kick advantage?), when it occurred in the match, where it occurred on the pitch and so on.

I hope this helps but I would advise you to watch a match on video and try to weigh up the factors influencing the referee's decision on when to play advantage. Put yourself in the position of the non-offending team and consider what they would want – play on or blow?

**7.** Lineout, throw-in to Red. The common cry of "Let him up" is wrong in law. As long as the arriving player is on his feet, he can play the ball or the player. Blue has

no legal right to exercise his various options – Red does have a right to prevent him doing so as long as he stays on his feet.

Law 14.

**8. Judgement call.**

First: was Blue trying to comply with the law (his three options)? If not, penalty Red.

Second: was Red trying to stay on his feet? If not, penalty Blue.

Third: unless anybody else committed an offence, scrum, probably attacking side ball.

Law 14. Law 16.7 (but if it is a pile-up rather than a genuine ruck, the law does not cover pile-ups! So use Law 16.7 anyway).

**9. Penalty Red.** Blue full back was playing the ball and Blue defender was in front of him. He attempted to play the ball before putting himself on-side.

Law 11.1

**10. Scrum, attacking team.** The maul was legally converted into a ruck, so the maul turnover provision does not apply. After the ruck started, Red did not move forward (even though they moved forward before that, in the maul).

Law 16.7

**11. Scrum Blue on the 15m line.** Such a tackle is legitimate and does not constitute forming a maul. Take the knock-on.

Law 15 & Law 17 Definitions. IRB Rulings 3 & 8 of 2003. Law 12 & 19.

**12. Penalty Blue.** Once the ball is caught, the supporters must immediately lower the jumper to the ground safely.

Law 19.9 (l)

**13. Stop play and reset the lineout.** Tell Blue you regard this as unsportsmanlike conduct. If you are sure Blue expected this, you could penalise them without the warning.

Law 10.4 (k)

**14. Blue choice:** kick again, or their scrum at the centre. This, however, only applies if the ball was grounded without delay.

Law 13.9.

**15. 22 drop out.** By not acting without delay, Blue forfeited his choice of kick or scrum.

Law 13.9 (c)

**16. 22 drop out.** By not acting without delay, Blue forfeited his choice of kick or scrum.

Law 13.9 (c)

**17.** Scrum to Blue where Red knocked on. He did not hold the ball, so the ball was not in touch. Play the knock-on.

Law 19 Definition.

**18.** Lineout to Blue at halfway. The ball was not in touch when Red attempted to play it. He failed to catch it and the ball went into touch. Red was the last player to touch it before that.

Law 19.4

*If you have come across any strange passages of play or incidents that might have had the referee (and you) scratching his head as to what to do next, please send it/them to [Keithrichardson@therfu.com](mailto:Keithrichardson@therfu.com) and I will try to get the best possible answer(s) from our panel of experts. The correspondence might also help other coaches.*